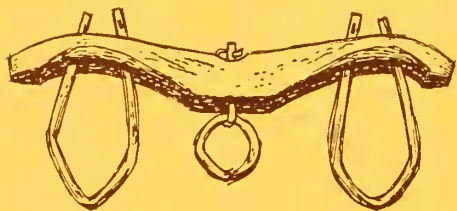


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Lincoln Comes to Wisconsin

Address

At

Annual Meeting

LINCOLN FELLOWSHIP OF WISCONSIN

Madison

February 12, 1943

By

Edward P. Alexander, Ph. D.

Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Vice-President, Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin

Published by

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Madison

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GEORGE PHILIP HAMBRECHT

1871 - 1943



HE Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin regretfully records the passing of its founder and President, George Philip Hambrecht, at Madison, Wisconsin, December 23, 1943, in his 72nd year.

It was through the initiative of Mr. Hambrecht that this organization of Wisconsin admirers of Abraham Lincoln came into being in 1940. He presided at the initial meeting. By unanimous accord he was chosen as the first President, and annually was re-elected without opposition. He was the author of numerous monographs on Lincoln. Mr. Hambrecht was a member of the Abraham Lincoln Association of Springfield, of the Lincoln National Advisory Group, and of other bodies in the field of Lincolniana.

The vastness of Mr. Hambrecht's storehouse of knowledge of Abraham Lincoln and of personalities and events associated with our sixteenth President, his ever ready willingness to share it with others, his "eternal vigilance" in pursuit of the truth about Lincoln, and his personal exemplification of the Lincoln ideal—that of helping provide wider opportunities for the development of the individual—these will remain as monuments to the life he lived among us.

FOREWORD

The address before the Fellowship reprinted here is remindful of an era when, as now, progress against savagery is part of the eternal plan. In Lincoln's young manhood this onward force was directed toward civilizing the red man—likened by the eminent Lincoln biographer, William E. Barton, as carrying "the White Man's burden."

"It is the burden of making the world safe for civilization," he put it, "and that process goes on more rapidly than the process of making civilization safe for the world. All in all we pay a high price for what we call culture."

Black Hawk has grown inestimably in popular respect, and Lincoln's brief part in the Black Hawk War is far more intelligibly understood today, as capable historians have revealed discriminatingly that abortive clash of whites and redmen in 1832—the only war ever fought on Wisconsin soil.

The author of the address, "Lincoln Comes to Wisconsin," a vice-president of the Lincoln Fellowship, is himself a Midwesterner by birth and training, with a predilection for authenticating the circumstances and evaluating the results of the Black Hawk War and for helping interpret validly the military and social movements of that time. Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Iowa-born, was Iowa-educated—Centerville high school, Drake University (the Bachelor's degree), the University of Iowa (the Master's degree), and was recipient of the doctorate in American history from Columbia University. The New York State Historical Society then employed him as its director, in addition to which he conducted the New York historical records survey, and supervised the museum at Coopers-town, a community famous as the home of James Fenimore Cooper and as the birthplace of baseball.

Dr. Alexander came to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin as director in 1941. His present task has the aim of revitalizing and enlarging the scope of the Society's services to the people of the State, to the end that Wisconsin history may be brought closer to the consciousness and the practical interests of the contemporary citizens who are the State itself.



LINCOLN AS A CAPTAIN IN THE BLACK HAWK WAR
(At Age 23)

Statue by Sculptor Leonard Crunelle on Site of Block House at Dixon, Illinois,
where Lincoln Commanded in 1832
(Dedicated in September, 1930)

LINCOLN COMES TO WISCONSIN

*By Edward P. Alexander, Director
State Historical Society of Wisconsin*



ON April 6, 1832, Black Hawk and his band of Sauk Indians crossed the Mississippi River into northern Illinois. The Hawk's immediate purpose, he said, was to "make corn," but he was angry at the treatment his people had received and was intending to start an Indian uprising if he could. He hoped that the Potawatomi and Winnebago would join him and, quite without any reason, that the British authorities in Canada would give him supplies.

Colonel Zachary Taylor, who had an important part in the little four months' war that followed, thought that if Fort Armstrong at Rock Island had been reinforced, if General Henry Atkinson had kept Black Hawk's band from ascending Rock River, or if the regular army instead of Stillman's mounted volunteers had overtaken the Indians, no blood would have been shed. As it was, Black Hawk with some 400 warriors and 900 noncombatants including old men, women, and children aroused the whole Illinois and Wisconsin frontier, and approximately 12,000 white men had a hand in putting down the Hawk's uprising at a cost of about \$2,000,000. On August 2, 1832, after the final slaughter had taken place in Wisconsin on the east bank of the Mississippi just south of the Bad Axe River, only about 150 members of Black Hawk's band of 1,300 remained alive. In the campaign some 200 white people also lost their lives.

It is not difficult to understand Black Hawk's action. He was a brave warrior, a forthright rather than a judicious man, and an inspiring leader. He had never liked the Long Knives or Americans. He fought for the British during the War of 1812, and he and his followers continued to be known as the "British band."

In 1804 three drunken Sauk and Fox chiefs had signed a treaty at St. Louis under which the two Indian tribes agreed to give up all their lands east of the Mississippi, though they were to be allowed to remain on them until the United States government should be ready to sell. Black Hawk always denounced this treaty, though in 1816 he was forced to agree to its confirmation. In violation of the treaty white squatters began to encroach upon the Indians' mineral and agricultural lands in northern Illinois and Wisconsin. On one occasion the Hawk himself was accused of stealing a hog, disarmed, and beaten by three white men.

In 1831 Black Hawk threatened the white squatters who were taking over his great village of Saukenuk on the Rock River near the present city of Rock Island. Thereupon several hundred soldiers and militia-men marched against him, and he was forced to sign a treaty agreeing to keep his followers on the west side of the great river. But during that winter as he brooded over the wrongs done him, his hatred for the whites increased. Wabokieshiek or White Cloud, a mischief-making

Winnebago prophet or medicine man, assured the Hawk that if he should rise against the white men, the British would help him and so would other Western Indian tribes. The fact that his great rival, Chief Keokuk, opposed such action only confirmed Black Hawk in his plans.

At a Fourth of July celebration in 1838 at Fort Madison shortly before his death at the age of 71, Black Hawk explained why he went to war simply but sincerely: "Rock River," he said, "was a beautiful country; I loved my towns, my cornfields and the home of my people. I fought for it."

But while we may sympathize with Black Hawk and his band and thrill to his moving statement of patriotism, we must not forget the frontiersman's point of view. Indian warfare had always been a bloody, treacherous business, and the settlers who shivered in the score of small fortified posts in the Illinois and Wisconsin lead region were quite properly frightened. They knew how the red men could kill, scalp, and torture men, women, and children. Many of them had actually seen Indian outrages, or some family experience had been impressed upon their minds from early childhood; Abraham Lincoln's grandfather, for example, who was also named Abraham Lincoln, had been killed by Indians about 1786 while he was opening a farm in the Kentucky wilderness. And in Wisconsin as recently as 1827, Red Bird, a Winnebago chief, had decided to "take meat" for a fancied wrong to his tribe, had visited Registre Gagnier, a mixed-blood friend of his living south of Prairie du Chien, and repaid his hospitality by killing him and scalping Gagnier's baby daughter though she did not die. The white man's fear of such outbreaks goes far to explain the merciless way in which the British band was hunted down like rats.

As soon as Governor John Reynolds of Illinois heard of Black Hawk's invasion, he called for volunteers from the state militia. At that time in Illinois as elsewhere every man between 18 and 45 belonged to the militia and had to train at least one day yearly or pay a fine. Abraham Lincoln, then 23 years old and living in New Salem, responded promptly to the governor's appeal and while serving in the campaign spent some eleven days in southern Wisconsin. Lincoln's brief autobiographical sketch written for campaign purposes in June, 1860, has a few lines on his experience as a soldier. Lincoln writes about himself in the third person as follows:

In less than a year Offutt's business was failing—had almost failed—when the Black Hawk war of 1832 broke out. Abraham joined a volunteer company, and, to his own surprise, was elected captain of it. He says he has not since had any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction. He went to the campaign, served near three months, met the ordinary hardships of such an expedition, but was in no battle. He now owns, in Iowa, the land upon which his own warrants for the service were located. Returning from the campaign, and encouraged by his great popularity among his immediate neighbors, he the same year ran for the legislature, and was beaten—his own precinct, however, casting its votes 277 for and 7 against him—and that, too, while he was an avowed Clay man,

and the precinct the autumn afterwards giving a majority of 115 to General Jackson over Mr. Clay. This was the only time Abraham was ever beaten by a direct vote of the people.

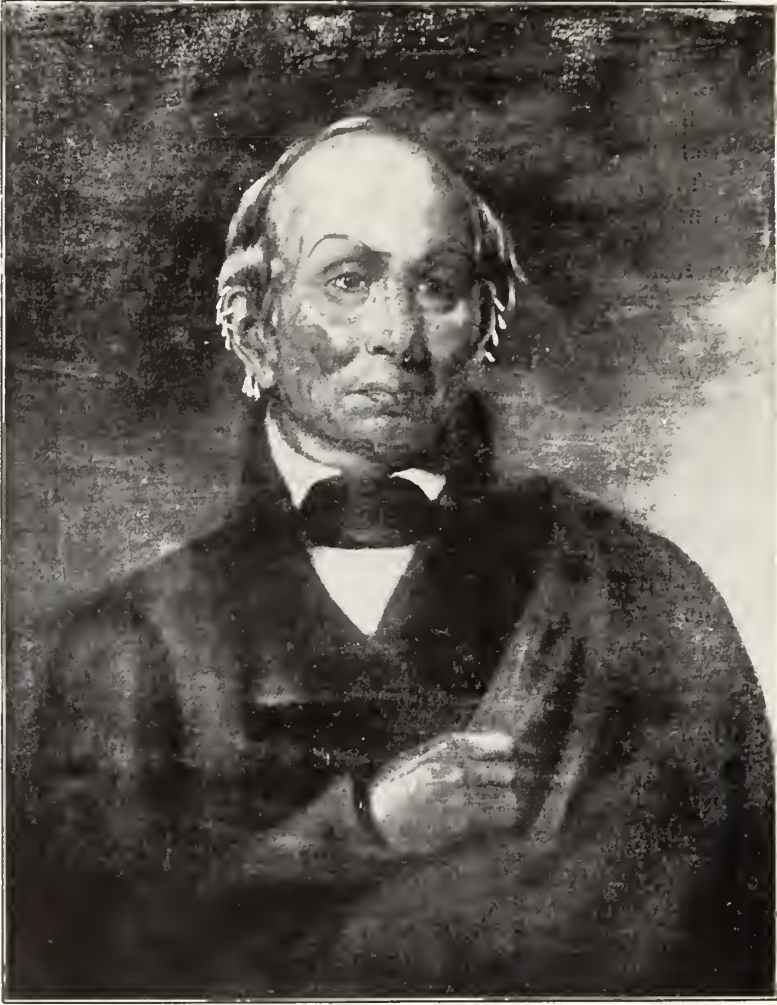
This account shows us several things. Lincoln had nothing else important to do when the war broke out since Denton Offutt's store where he worked was about to close. Lincoln is a little less candid about another matter. He implies that he decided to run for the legislature after he returned from the campaign, whereas he had already announced his candidacy on March 9, 1832. He probably hoped to help his chances by acquiring a war record. Lincoln is also modest about his part in the war but obviously proud of his service, of his election as captain, and of the 160 acres in Iowa which he received as a bonus.

But after his return to civil life Lincoln with good sense did not assume the title of captain as did so many of his comrades. No good soldier boasts much of his military record, no matter how proud he may be of it. When he was a congressman Lincoln used his war experiences in a humorous and sarcastic way to ridicule the War of 1812 record of General Lewis Cass, who was a candidate for the presidency. This speech of July 27, 1848, runs as follows:

By the way, Mr. Speaker, did you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir; in the days of the Black Hawk war I fought, bled, and came away. . . . I was not at Stillman's defeat, but . . . I saw the place very soon afterwards. It is quite certain I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion. . . . If General Cass went in advance of me in picking whortleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live fighting Indians, it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes, and although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry.

Because of the research of Dr. Harry E. Pratt of the Abraham Lincoln Association of Springfield, we are able to trace Lincoln's service in the Black Hawk campaign almost day by day. On April 21, 1832, the recruits from New Salem met on a farm at Richland Creek nine miles southwest of the village and formed a company of mounted volunteers with Lincoln as captain. The Clary's Grove boys who were good friends of Lincoln's were in his company with their leader, Jack Armstrong, as first sergeant. One soldier in another company said Lincoln's command was "the hardest set of men he ever saw." The next day they went into camp at Beardstown where they remained for a week, being mustered into the state service on April 28 and becoming a part of the Fourth Illinois Regiment of Mounted Volunteers.

The company then proceeded to Yellow Banks on the Mississippi (today Oquawka, Illinois), and on May 7 marched to the Rock River and up it to Dixon's Ferry, where they remained, May 12-19, except for an excursion to Stillman's battlefield to bury those who had fallen there on the 14th. On May 20 the army began a march up Rock River, then along Sycamore Creek, and finally south to



BLACK HAWK . . . 1767-1838

From original oil portrait by R. M. Sully, painted at Fortress Monroe, while Black Hawk was confined there in 1833. The property of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Ottawa on the Illinois River. There on May 26 Lincoln reenlisted for 20 days, becoming a private in a company with Alexander White as captain. The next day Captain Lincoln's original company was mustered out, and he transferred from White's company to one commanded by Captain Elijah Iles which contained many former "generals, colonels, captains, and distinguished men."

Captain Iles's company of Independent Rangers on June 5 left Ottawa for Dixon's Ferry, proceeded on to Apple River Fort and Galena. On this march the Rangers met Colonel Henry Dodge of Dodgeville, hero of the Wisconsin lead country, and 150 men, were afraid at first that they were Indians. The company returned to Dixon's Ferry on June 13 and went on to Fort Wilbourn on the Illinois River opposite Peru, where they were mustered out on June 16.

Lincoln at once reenlisted for another 30 days in the Independent Spy Corps under Captain Jacob M. Early. On June 22 Captain Early's company left for Dixon's Ferry and on the 25th and 26th made a forced march to Kellogg's Grove where a skirmish had just taken place in which five white men and nine Indians were killed. The Spy Corps returned to Dixon's Ferry to join General James D. Henry's brigade in its march up Rock River seeking Black Hawk's main force.

On July 1, 1832, the army crossed Rock River at Turtle Village (today Beloit, Wisconsin), the soldiers sleeping on their arms behind log breastworks that night, in order to be ready for any surprise attack. Next day Captain Early's men were in advance of the army, found Black Hawk's trail at the south end of Lake Koshkonong, and explored the west shore of the lake. On July 6 the army marched up the east bank and made camp four miles above the mouth of the White Water River.

The Winnebago guides, evidently trying to mislead the whites, reported that Black Hawk was in camp on the White Water a few miles east, and the soldiers took an almost impassable route 15 miles up the river, but on the 8th returned to Burnt Village near the present Fort Atkinson at the mouth of the White Water. Next day, Early's company by means of rafts crossed to an island on Lake Koshkonong where the Winnebago scouts said Black Hawk was hiding, but did not find any Indians. Apparently the Hawk was up the Rock River only a day or two's march away during this period. On July 10 Lincoln and his comrades in the company were honorably discharged "with the special thanks" of General Atkinson at his headquarters four miles up the White Water.

That night the horses of Lincoln and his companion, George M. Harrison, were stolen, and on July 11 they set out for Dixon's Ferry, riding horseback part of the way through the generosity of their friends. They went south to Peoria from there and bought a canoe to go down the Illinois River, arriving on July 17 at Havana, where they sold the canoe and walked overland to New Salem.

To this simple outline of Lincoln's service in the Black Hawk War and in Wisconsin can be added as many details as the gullibility of the investigator will allow. Since Lincoln has become our great personification of what we mean by

American democracy, a thousand people have come forward to recall details about his life, and ten thousand myths have clustered about his career.

Lincoln did leave us a description of what he saw when he marched up after the skirmish of June 24 at Kellogg's Grove where five white men were killed.

I remember just how those men looked as we rode up the little hill where their camp was [said Lincoln long afterwards]. The red light of the morning sun was streaming upon them as they lay heads toward us on the ground. And every man had a round, red spot on top of his head, about as big as a dollar where the redskins had taken his scalp. It was frightful, but it was grotesque, and the red sunlight seemed to paint everything all over. I remember that one man had on buckskin breeches.

That simple paragraph was written by a sensitive man who had a great command of language.

Some of the incidents of the campaign are well authenticated. Lincoln did wrestle with Lorenzo Dow Thompson of St. Clair County and apparently lost two straight falls in a match to decide whether Lincoln's company or Captain William Moore's company should have a certain camp ground at Beardstown. Lieutenant Robert Anderson, who in 1861 was in command at Fort Sumter when the Civil War began, did muster Lincoln into, and later out of, Captain Hies's company. The story of the old Potawatomi Indian who came into camp one day on Sycamore Creek with a safe-conduct paper is also apparently true. The company wanted to kill him as a spy, but he was saved by Lincoln. Some of the men murmured that Lincoln was cowardly, and he challenged anyone to come forward who doubted his courage.

Others of the stories are not well documented. Lincoln, it is related, schemed to be elected captain instead of another candidate, William Kirkpatrick, because Kirkpatrick had once cheated Lincoln out of \$2.00 in a dispute about a canthook. When Captain Lincoln gave his first order to the company he is supposed to have received the reply: "Go to hell, sir!" On one occasion, the captain is said to have discharged a firearm within 50 feet of camp, and had his sword taken away from him for a day as punishment; another time, the company stole some whiskey, wine, and brandy, and the innocent Lincoln who had known nothing about the prank had to wear a wooden sword. Again, Lincoln lifted a barrel of whiskey up, says the story, and drank from the bung hole; when reproached for breaking his rule of not using strong liquor, Lincoln spat out the whiskey and turned the laugh on his accuser. Lincoln, too, one story has it, refused to obey a command of a regular officer, pointing out that he was bound by the laws of the state of Illinois.

The company one day came to a narrow gate, they say, and Lincoln could not remember the command for them to go through in single file, so he ordered his men to fall out for two minutes and re-form on the other side of the gate. Later on when Lincoln was a private, he and his companions stole a cow with a stub tail from some officers, it is related, and to escape detection attached to bossy a tail brought from a slaughterhouse. A short little colonel seems to have told Lincoln

to stand up straight and hold his head up high, whereupon Lincoln replied: "Good-by, Colonel, for I shall never see you again." Someone asked Lincoln if he was afraid of Black Hawk, and young Abe said: "Well I guess not, I'm no chicken." On another occasion, someone accused Lincoln of retreating from danger during a scout, to which he is supposed to have said that he did not run away "but, after all, I reckon if anybody had seen me going, and had been told I was going for a doctor, he would have thought somebody was almighty sick."

It will be noticed that nearly all these stories emphasize the fact that the soldiers in the Black Hawk War were poorly disciplined and given to playing pranks. There can be little doubt that these general statements are true, and the mythical stories do not do too much damage as long as we recognize them for what they are. After all, they do give warmth and life to the facts. Some of them, such as the one about the whiskey barrel, seem to show a Parson Weems touch for moralizing. Others as, for example, the one about Lincoln's not running away portray a typical frontier love for distinguishing between terms. Everyone agrees, too, that Lincoln was a great story teller, that he had a humorous tale for every occasion, and that he was one of the best-liked men in the whole army.

Another myth which flourished for long held that Abraham Lincoln was mustered into the army by Lieutenant Jefferson Davis of the regulars. This, of course, spread like wildfire, because it pleased people to think that Lincoln and Davis, who later opposed each other as heads of the Union and the Confederacy, should have met as a raw militia captain and a polished lieutenant of the regular army. But Lieutenant Davis, though he did see considerable service in Wisconsin between 1829 and 1833, was home on furlough during the whole of the Black Hawk War and did not return to Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien until August 18, 1832, more than two weeks after the Battle of Bad Axe. The Lincoln-Davis myth is as false as the other story so often told that Davis eloped with Zachary Taylor's daughter from Fort Crawford.

But let us ask now what effect the Black Hawk War had upon Lincoln. The campaign did not, of course, as some have tried to maintain, make him a great strategist able to cope with the military problems of the Civil War. But he did come to appreciate how fighting men thought and felt; he had faced danger, had lain down at night musket in hand and expecting the Indians to attack at any minute. He knew what war meant to the common man, and perhaps his ready sympathy for soldiers who fell asleep or committed some other offense during the Civil War can be partially traced to Lincoln's experiences in the Black Hawk campaign.

In addition Lincoln continued his political education. As captain he had to handle a rough set of men unaccustomed to taking orders from anyone, and this situation added to his already great understanding of human nature and made him even more adept at influencing people. He also met many men with whom he was to come in contact in his later career, including Major John Todd Stuart, his first law partner at Springfield. And he impressed scores of young men of Illinois with his ability to wrestle, jump, and run, his good humor and marvelous story

telling. As soon as he returned from the campaign, he hastened to have the *Saugamo Journal* of Springfield rectify an oversight in its columns, and the newspaper for July 19 reads: "Some weeks ago (May 3) we gave a list of those candidates (eight) of this County (omitting by accident the name of Captain Lincoln, of New Salem) who were on the frontier periling their lives in the service of their country." Lincoln was already campaigning for the legislature, since the election would take place on August 6.

As for Wisconsin, its swamps and wilderness about Lake Koshkonong probably did not deeply impress Lincoln, nor did his short visit have much influence upon the territory. Lincoln's one other journey into Wisconsin of which we are certain did not take place until the fall of 1859 when he went to Milwaukee to address the state fair of the Wisconsin Agricultural Society on September 30, made speeches at Beloit and Janesville next day, and stayed overnight with Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Tallman at Janesville. By this time, Lincoln had become a prominent political figure, and his appearance in the state was more significant.

Even though Lincoln's first visit to the Wisconsin country did not have any deep meaning for the future of the region, we are glad that he was here. Wisconsin and Lincoln were both young and energetic and somewhat crude at the time. Wisconsin's agricultural and timber resources were virtually untouched. Lincoln's capacities and abilities had not yet unfolded. And it is pleasant to think of the tall soldier toiling through the Wisconsin wilderness with sweat on his brow, helping his comrades along with his merry stories, planning not too carefully for the future but growing each day in his understanding of the men and women who made up his America.



The Black Hawk Trail is marked on the campus of the University of Wisconsin by this tablet. Inscription:

Black Hawk—Sauk Chief
Retreated Through These
Grounds July 21, 1832
Pursued by Militia
And U. S. Regulars

Placed by The Class of
1888, U. W.
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† Died March 13, 1943.

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